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Nominee for Deputy Director of C.I.A. An Electronic-Age Intelligence Expert

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 1 — For a man considered by many to be America's aster spy, Bobby Ray Inman is something of an anomaly. He has never taken part in a covert operation or spent much time collecting intelligence data in the field. His name evokes the spirit of a country music ballad more than an espionage thriller.

But Vice Admiral Inman, picked by President Reagan to be Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, the nation's second-highest intelligence organization, is the prototype of an electronic-age spy.

His tools are satellites, microwave stations and computers. As director of the National Security Agency since 1977, Admiral Inman has overseen the nation's largest and most expensive intelligence organization. Its mission includes cracking enemy codes, developing unbreakable ciphers for the United States and, most importantly, monitoring, translating and analyzing worldwide communications among nations, selected foreign citizens and some corporations.

The security agency is part of the Defense Department and independent of the Central Intelligence Agency, which uses information collected by the security agency in preparing intelligence reports for the President. The lines of authority are blurred, however, because the C.I.A. director has the additional responsibility of coordinating the Government's various intelligence-gathering operations, including those of the National Security Agency.

Earns Praise From Many

Admiral Inman's performance has drawn praise from several quarters. Harold Brown, who supervised the security agency as Secretary of Defense in the Carter Administration, called Admiral Inman "one of the brightest military people I have ever known."

Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale said that Admiral Inman was "brilliant in every respect." Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, recommended Admiral Inman for the No. 2 spot at the intelligence agency to William J. Casey, the director.

The Intelligence Committee has scheduled confirmation hearings Tuesday for Admiral Inman. Swift and unanimous approval of his nomination by the committee and the Senate seems assured. The White House has also recommended that Mr. Inman be promoted to full admiral. If the Senate concurs, as expected, Mr. Inman, who is 49 years old, would be one of the youngest four-star admirals in Navy history.

Information available on Admiral Inman's rise shows a career military man willing to break the cautious conventions of his trade.

security agency analyst who was found to be a homosexual to keep his job and security clearances, according to intelligence sources. Intelligence organizations usually dismiss homosexuals or deprive them of their security clearances because they are considered vulnerable to blackmail.

Senators who deal frequently with Admiral Inman said that his briefings differed from those given by most other officials. "Most intelligence officials hedge their comments," said Senator Joseph R. Biden, Democrat of Delaware. "Inman is a straight talker. I've watched him blow away other officials and their comments by providing simple, non-opinionated data. He deals in facts."

Admiral Inman's colleagues said that he occasionally slipped out of Washington and traveled tourist class on commercial airlines to address small groups of professors and students at Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford and other schools in an effort to build bridges between the intelligence-gathering and academic worlds. His friends said that Admiral Inman, dressed in a business suit and driving a rented car unaccompanied by aides, looked like a traveling salesman.

Information Begets Power

The modest demeanor belies the importance of Admiral Inman's position. In a city where information is often said to be power, Admiral Inman, as the security agency's director, has access to more raw intelligence information than anyone in Washington.

The security agency's operations are conducted in strict secrecy. Its headquarters is a large office building on the grounds of Fort Meade, in the Maryland countryside near Washington. Intelligence officials estimated the agency's budget to be more than \$2 billion a year, larger than that of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The security agency's headquarters is the nerve center for a network of facilities and employees around the world, as well as numerous satellites that monitor communications. Aided by computers, the staff sifts through cable traffic, telephone calls and coded messages looking for anything considered significant on subjects ranging from Soviet military activity to world oil trade, according to intelligence officials.

In the 1960's and early 1970's, the security agency's eavesdropping capabilities were used domestically as part of the Government's effort to gather data on antiwar groups. Such practices were stopped by the Ford Administration and are now prohibited by Justice Department guidelines.

There are occasions, however, when information collected by the security agency involving American citizens is turned over to the Justice Department. Billy Carter's dealings with Libya were

In April, when the department's investigation into Billy Carter's ties with Libya was dormant, Admiral Inman received a report indicating that the Libyan Government was planning to pay President Carter's brother \$200,000.

Since the possibility of a violation of American law existed, and because Billy Carter appeared to be the target of a Libyan plan to gain influence in the United States, Admiral Inman informed Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti, Justice Department sources said.

Born in Texas

Admiral Inman was born April 4, 1931, in Rhonesboro, Tex. He entered the Navy after graduation from the University of Texas in 1950, becoming an ensign in 1952. He is married and is the father of two boys.

He rose through the ranks rapidly and began specializing in intelligence work in 1961, serving as chief intelligence officer for the 7th Fleet; naval attaché in Sweden, and Director of Naval Intelligence from 1974 to 1976. From 1976 to 1977, he served as vice director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. In July 1977 he was named director of the National Security Agency.

Admiral Inman's first name, Bobby, rather than Robert, was proposed by his grandfather, friends said.